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University of Illinois School of Veterinary Medicine Wildlife Clinic

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Honor's Service Project Paper

University of Illinois School of Veterinary Medicine Wildlife Medical Clinic

By: Maci Oelschlager, Fall 2013

This semester, I was given the opportunity to be an undergraduate volunteer at the University of Illinois, School of Veterinary Medicine's Wildlife Medical Clinic. I learned a lot by volunteering at the Wildlife clinic as well as gained a lot of hands on experience. Volunteering at the Wildlife Medical Clinic, I was able to gain and build on the skills of determination, confidence, and dedication.

The Wildlife Clinic is a nonprofit organization that is run and operated by students in the University of Illinois's School of Veterinary Medicine and a few undergraduates from the University of Illinois. I am a Pathways student so I was able to take part in being a volunteer. The clinic strives on the aid of the public and the student's willingness to learn. The clinic treats injured wildlife and makes them ready to be sent to a rehabber, which in turn will equip them with the necessary skills to return to the



Figure 1: Wildlife Medical Clinic

wild. By being a volunteer, I was assigned to a team which then gets assigned a patient each time a new one comes into the clinic. Since it is a wildlife clinic we didn't see your average cat or dog. I grew used to seeing Great Horned Owls, Red Tailed Hawks, squirrels, raccoons, Robin's, rabbits, hummingbirds, etc. The list goes on and on. Many people never get the chance to

see these animals up close and personal and I can say that I have. I have personally handled these

animals, administered drugs to help them heal, and nursed them back to health. This is an opportunity that I am never going to forget and I plan on continuing into the spring semester. I am so grateful to be a part of the Wildlife clinic because of all of the new skills I gained along the way.

The first skill I was able to grasp on to was determination. In order to keep the clinic running smoothly, it lives on the determination of the volunteers to find a treatment for their patient. Unlike a human who can just tell you what is ailing them, an animal cannot. It is especially hard with an animal from the wild because they are so stressed with they are in the clinic. They are completely out of their realm unlike a cat or dog who is relatively used to being handled by a human. When an animal comes into the clinic, it is our duty to perform a full body exam, note the vitals, and determine a plan of attack to conquer what is

Figure 2: Syringe feeding a baby squirrel



Figure 3: Great Horned Owl



ailing the patient. This means diving into textbooks, previous records, and asking veterinarians at the School of Veterinary Medicine to find a cure. As a team, we did not give up on any patient. If it meant coming in every hour to administer an IV fluid to a patient, we did it. There was multiple times were I was at the clinic at ten at night syringe feeding a baby squirrel. Without determination our team and I would have given up on many patients. Savannah,

a Barred Owl, had been in the clinic since May of 2013 and was assigned to our team in August. She had a wing fracture and we were determined to make things better and get her approved to be sent to a rehabber. We performed laser therapy, passive range of motion therapy, and active range of motion

therapy. In October we were able to release Savannah to a rehabber where she would learn again to hunt and live on her own. This was a true recovery story and without the determination and reluctance



Figure 5: Fawns

to give up our team Savannah would have never lived to see a better day. The determination I learned at the clinic is abundant and has carried over into my life in many ways than I ever would have thought imaginable.

The second skill I was able to learn was confidence. I am studying animal

sciences in the hopes to one day apply to the University of Illinois's School of Veterinary Medicine.

When I started volunteering many of the people I was performing treatments with were 2nd and 3rd year veterinary students. There was a lot of medical jargon that was entirely over my head and I felt nervous to make a speculation that could be wrong. I soon learned that the vet students were very willing in showing and teaching me a lot of the things I didn't know how to do. The first time I gave fluids to a turtle my hand was shaking very badly and I had to have multiple vet students watch over me to ensure I was doing it correctly. Today, I can administer fluids to a turtle entirely on my own. I had gained the confidence that I can and will help these patients thanks to the help of the vet students. Our team also held meetings every week to discuss our patients and which course of action we should take. There was also a lot of drugs that the animals needed in order to heal and often times I was shy about which one to

consider in the meetings because I did not want to say something wrong. Now, I am confident in my knowledge about the Wildlife clinic and I call out different drugs and their descriptions as well as why they will help the animal. My confidence grew in my knowledge and I was not afraid of failure because it

Figure 4: Screech Owl



was in failure that I found how to gain the most knowledge. Another example is how I went about handling large birds. On my first day I was very timid about catching Savannah because I did not want to hurt her. With many trials and errors and the boosting of my confidence, after a few weeks I was able to catch her and handle her with little to no struggle. Now that I am confident in my knowledge it has helped me in my schoolwork, especially with my animal science class that I am currently taking at the University of Illinois. With each and every treatment I continue to learn more and more about wildlife medicine and with that comes a gaining of confidence that I can truly help these animals survive.

Figure 7: Mallard Ducklings



The third skill I learned more about was how important dedication is to the Wildlife Medical Clinic. Without dedicated volunteers, the clinic would be composed of nothing. No one is paid to work at the clinic. This includes the managers, secretaries, coordinators, volunteers, and even the sponsored veterinarian, Dr. Whittington, that looks over the entire clinic. There are four controlled drugs in the clinic that have to be documented closely and if abused, Dr. Whittington could lose her veterinary license. Dr. Whittington is 100% dedicated to the clinic and is willing to put her license on the line to ensure

these animals get the treatments they deserve. To me that is very inspiring. Things like that push me to be dedicated to the clinic. This means waking up at six AM two days a week to perform treatments then going to school the rest of the day. As said before, I have been at the clinic at 10 at night just to ensure the belly of that baby squirrel was full so he could sleep

peacefully that night. I did not care in the least bit just as long as the lives of these animals were being improved. Dedication and determination went hand in hand on determining the likelihood of these

Figure 6: Hummingbird



patients. These two skills have to be met in order to even be a volunteer at the Wildlife Clinic and I am fortunate enough to have gained them as well.

Volunteering at the Wildlife Medical Clinic has been a learning experience in more ways than none. I am completely determined to help any animal that is assigned to our team and dedicated to seeing them make it back into the wild. I have gained confidence in my work and knowledge. These three skills have carried over into my work life, school life, and social life and developed me into a well-rounded person. I am extremely grateful to be given such an opportunity, not just an Honor's Project, and experience and I look forward to volunteering in the spring semester and continuing to learn new and interesting things.